

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A method for transmitting electronic data, the method comprising:
 2 receiving, at a communications system host, electronic data transmitted from a sender
 3 and addressed to an intended recipient;
 4 authenticating the electronic data based on attributes of the electronic data; and
 5 appending information to the electronic data indicating that the electronic data have
 6 been authenticated.

1 2. The method of claim 1 wherein authenticating comprises identifying the sender of the
 2 electronic data.

1 3. The method of claim 2 wherein the sender is identified by a screen name.

1 4. The method of claim 2 wherein the sender is identified by an IP address.

1 5. The method of claim 1 wherein authenticating further comprises designating a level of
 2 security corresponding to the sender of the electronic data.

1 6. The method of claim 1 wherein authenticating further comprises verifying that at least one
 2 attribute of the electronic data is an attribute of an authorized sender.

1 7. The method of claim 2 wherein the attribute comprises a screen name.

1 8. The method of claim 2 wherein the attribute comprises an IP address.

1 9. The method of claim 1 wherein authenticating further comprises designating a level of
 2 security corresponding to at least one attribute of the electronic data.

1 10. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 2 storing content of the electronic data in a first storage area of the communications
 3 system host; and

4 storing attributes of the electronic data in a second storage area of the
5 communications system host.

6
7 11. The method of claim 1 further comprising presenting the appended information to the
8 intended recipient.

1 12. The method of claim 1 wherein the appended information is presented with the attributes
2 of the electronic data.

1 13 The method of claim 11 wherein the appended information is presented with the content
2 of the electronic data.

1 14. The method of claim 11 wherein the appended information is capable of being rendered
2 by the intended recipient as an icon indicative of authentication.

1 15. The method of claim 11 wherein the appended information is capable of being rendered
2 by the intended recipient as a graphical user interface indicative of authentication.

1 16. The method of claim 15 wherein the graphical user interface includes a border indicative
2 of authentication around contents of electronic data.

1 17. The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic data comprises an e-mail message.

1 18. The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic data comprises an instant message.

1 19. An apparatus for transmitting electronic data, the apparatus comprising a host configured
2 to:

3 receive, at a communications system host, electronic data transmitted from a sender
4 and addressed to an intended recipient;

5 authenticate the electronic data based on attributes of the electronic data; and

6 append information to the electronic data indicating that the electronic data have been
7 authenticated.

1 20. A computer program, stored on a computer readable medium, comprising instructions
2 for:
3 receiving, at a communications system host, electronic data transmitted from a sender
4 and addressed to an intended recipient;
5 authenticating the electronic data based on attributes of the electronic data; and
6 appending information to the electronic data indicating that the electronic data have been
7 authenticated.

1 21. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the computer readable medium is a disc.

1 22. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the computer readable medium is a client
2 device.

1 23. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the computer readable medium is a host
2 device.

1 24. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the computer readable medium is a
2 propagated signal.

1 25. A method for receiving electronic data transmitted from a sender to an intended recipient
2 through a communications system, the communications system authenticating the electronic
3 data based on attributes of the electronic data, the method comprising:
4 receiving, from a communications system host, information indicating that the
5 electronic data have been authenticated; and
6 rendering the information to a user of the intended recipient so as to inform the user
7 of the intended recipient that the electronic data has been authenticated.

1 26. The method of claim 25 wherein the information is rendered by the intended recipient as
2 an icon indicative of authentication.

1 27. The method of claim 25 wherein the information is rendered by the intended recipient as
2 a graphical user interface indicative of authentication.

1 28. The method of claim 27 wherein the graphical user interface includes a border indicative
2 of authentication around contents of the electronic data.

1 29. The method of claim 25 wherein the information is rendered with contents of the
2 electronic data.

1 30. The method of claim 25 wherein the information is rendered with attributes of the
2 electronic data.

1 31. The method of claim 25 wherein the electronic data comprises an e-mail message.

1 32. The method of claim 25 wherein the electronic data comprises an instant message.

1 33. An apparatus for receiving electronic data transmitted from a sender to an intended
2 recipient through a communications system, the communications system authenticating the
3 electronic data based on attributes of the electronic data, the apparatus comprising a client
4 configured to:

5 receive, from a communications system host, information indicating that the
6 electronic data have been authenticated; and

7 render the appended information to a user of the intended recipient so as to inform the
8 user of the intended recipient that the electronic data have been authenticated.

1 34. A computer program stored on a computer-readable medium for receiving electronic
2 data transmitted from a sender to an intended recipient through a communications system, the
3 communications system authenticating the electronic data based on attributes of electronic
4 data, the computer program comprising instructions for:

5 receiving, from a communications system host, information indicating that the
6 electronic data have been authenticated; and

7 rendering the information to a user of the intended recipient so as to inform the user
8 of the intended recipient that the electronic data have been authenticated.

1 35. The computer program of claim 34, wherein the computer readable medium is a disc.

1 36. The computer program of claim 34, wherein the computer readable medium is a client
2 device.

1 37. The computer program of claim 34, wherein the computer readable medium is a host
2 device.

1 38. The computer program of claim 34, wherein the computer readable medium is a
2 propagated signal.

1 39. A graphical user interface for rendering information associated with electronic data
2 transmitted from a sender to an intended recipient, the graphical user interface rendering the
3 information to a user of the intended recipient so as to inform the user of the intended
4 recipient that the electronic data have been authenticated, the graphical user interface
5 comprising a border indicative of authentication around contents of the electronic data.